# It is Generally the Case That

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### 1--*Introduction*

Philosophers, in deliberations ranging from ethics to the philosophy of science, have paid scrupulous attention to universality. Generalizations which are not universal, which admit "negative instances," have received virtually no attention.[1] I may say of Charlie, for example, that it is generally the case that he tells the truth, and the fact that Charlie does not always tell the truth is consistent with the first statement. Generalizations of this type, conspicuous and important in ordinary discourse, shall be discussed here.

More precisely, I shall be interested in the following question: "If A is a tenseless proposition, under what conditions do we assert that 'It is generally the case that A' ('gA') is true?"[2] In other words, I wish to provide a semantics for "g."

With this end in mind, a consideration of the following dialogue may prove instructive. P1 (person 1) claims that proposition A is true. P2 provides for P1's benefit a situation where A is false. P1 replies somewhat emphatically: "But, *it is generally the case* that A is true." Such conversational exchanges are familiar enough. We note again that a situation where A is false does not necessitate gA's falsity. When A is always true, on the other hand, it seems somewhat *peculiar* to maintain that gA is true. However, it hardly appears right to say that it is *false*. (We will take V(gA)=T in such cases.) Instead we shall simply note that it would be nice if our semantical analysis helped account for this peculiarity. Along these lines, it would also be desirable if our semantics helped explain P1's sense of indignation in his last reply.

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[1] A noteworthy exception is Romane Clark's excellent article "*Prima Facie* Generalizations," appearing in *Conceptual Change*, Pearce and Maynard (eds.), (D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht-Holland, 1973), pp. 42-54. Clark's concern, however, is with the *prima facie* generalizations of the form "A's can B" (e.g., to cite one of his examples, "Cheetah's can outrun men") which very clearly admit negative instances.

[2] I restrict myself to tenseless propositions simply to insure that gA is well-formed. Actually the complement sentence *can* be tensed, if, for example, "generally" is being used in the style of a nontemporal adverb of quantification (e.g., g(the citizens of N.Y.C. will be asleep at 1 A.M. on July 4th, 1983)). I cannot provide an autonomous characterization of {P/gP is well-formed}. However, I hope my semantics will apply in all such cases, nonetheless.

I shall consider an initially attractive semantics for "g" and show why it is inadequate.

2–*"A Counting Semantics"*

We stipulate that V(gA)=T iff (A is true in most situations). Here, we attempt to adjudicate the problem of gA's truth value, in what appears to be the most natural of ways--counting. We examine the sets of situations where A is true and false respectively, and we count to see which set has more elements. gA is true iff the first set has more elements. And in cases where we fail to possess a clear picture of what these sets look like (for example, if A is the proposition "n, a positive integer greater than two, is such that $x^n + y^n = z^n$ is false)[3], our rule breaks down, and so we may arguably defer judgment.

The present account is defective. (1) There is the problem of whether "most situations" means most of all possible situations, past situations, or something else. (2) There is a standard mathematical cardinality problem--the sets we examine may be infinite and possess the same cardinality. Two examples illustrate each of these problems.

a--Suppose that Willie is a simply fabulous gambler. Invariably he rolls twos. Of Willie we could (correctly) say g(he rolls twos). But is this the same as saying that "In most situations he rolls twos"? What situations does "most" refer to? "Most" cannot simply refer to all past situations. Another gambler, Sam, may have had little experience and been very lucky. He may have rolled dice on only seven occasions, four times rolling a two. We would not want to say g(Sam rolls twos). Nor can "most" refer to all situations, since that would include future situations, which, *prima facie*, we know nothing about.

b--Suppose that a math teacher computes the value of a definite integral and finds it to be equal to one. A confused student interrupts and asks: "Is the value of a definite integral always equal to one?" The teacher replies: "No, and in point of fact, g(the value of a definite integral is not equal to one) (gA)." It is a plain mathematical fact that there are as many (in the sense of a one to one correspondence of the elements of the sets) definite integrals having value one as there are those whose value is not

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[3] The conjecture that for n greater than 2, $x^n+y^n=z^n$ is *never* true is known as Fermat's conjecture (actually Fermat's "last theorem,"--quotation marks because he never provided a proof, but in notes posthumously discovered, claimed that he had one). It is one of the outstanding open problems in number theory. More to the point, very little is known about the truth of $x^n+y^n=z^n$ when n is very large; for example, when n is greater than $10^{10}$. Since the set of positive integers is infinite, we lack a clear picture of what our sets look like. Computer technology may have something to say about this situation one day.

one.[4] gA's truth value is not, therefore, explained under the rubric of the present analysis. That account may be salvageable, however, upon some suitable interpretation of "most" and/or "situation."

(b) above demonstrates that "g" is not properly understood as a merely "quantitative" notion--one may have an effective procedure of some kind to produce as many situations as one desires where A is false, even though gA is true. (a) suggests that in providing a semantics for "g" we may have to consider certain *kinds* of relevant situations. And, as we shall see later, given the appropriate relativization to situations of a certain kind, quantitative considerations may indeed become significant. Finally, our friend Sam, the lucky gambler, reminds us that, in some instances at least, the number of situations we have in our stock may be an important factor in determining whether or not we can justifiably assert gA. These considerations lead us to our next account.

### 3--*The "Important Situations" Semantics*

#### a--*General Strategy*

We associate with each tenseless proposition A, a set of situations, I(A), the "important situations" with respect to A. What makes a situation "important" is in no way self-evident, and I will attempt to clarify this crucial concept, shortly. We now stipulate that V(gA)=T iff (1) I (A) is sufficiently large and (2) A is true "more times than not" at situations in I(A). (Thus if (1) holds and gA is true as many times as it is false, V(gA)=F. And if (1) fails to obtain, gA is truth-valueless.)

Admittedly, the "more times than not" phrase in (2) is not very helpful. The problem of the implicit probability component in "g" will be discussed at length much later.

#### b--*Importance*

But what exactly are these "important situations"? In example (a) the important situations would be the ones where Willie's tosses of the dice were his actions *and moreover appeared to reflect his skill or lack of it* at rolling dice. Hence, if he rolled the dice as a result of his hand being jerked, or with a physically impaired hand, the situations would not be important. Above and beyond this, however, the situations are important

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[4] Proof: Clearly the cardinality of the second set is greater than or equal (in the sense of there existing a function from the second set *onto* the first set) to the cardinality of the first set. If $\int_b^a f(x)dx=1$ then $\int_b^a c(f(x))dx=c$; whence, it is clear that the cardinality of the first set is greater than or equal to the cardinality of the second set. By the Schroeder-Cantor-Bernstein theorem of set theory, we see that the two cardinalities are equal.

insofar as they appear to provide us with an indication of Willie's skill. (That we need observe a certain number of situations in Willie's case, seems obvious enough.)

In example (b), few situations where integrals were evaluated would be unimportant. The mark of an unimportant situation would be that the integral be chose for calculation precisely because it had some particular value. Important situations therefore, would correspond to those cases where calculations arose "naturally," at least in the sense that the integrals were *not* deliberately chosen because they did or did not have a value one.

Two more examples will help us obtain a closer hold on the meaning of importance and shall perhaps be suggestive of some of the philosophical relevance of "g."

(1) Suppose that P has a *prima facie* obligation to act in accord with a rule R1. For example, P has a *prima facie* obligation to "tell the truth." Now to say that P has a *prima facie* obligation to tell the truth, Kant notwithstanding, is not, of course, to say, that P is always so obligated. Telling the truth may lead murderers to my mother, and so forth. The obligation is in force in all those cases where it is not overridden by another *prima facie* rule R2 (e.g., in the above case R2 may be some sort of protection of life rule).

To avoid such verbal oddities as saying that a rule is false at a situation, we shall now speak of a proposition A "expressing a rule R." "A" is simply the statement of the rule. I believe that if A expresses a *prima facie* rule of obligation R, then gA is true (e.g., g(telling the truth is right), g(one should do all one can to save another's life, etc.). The important cases, I believe, correspond to those situations where no other *prima facie* rule comes in conflict with R. It perhaps should not be surprising then that a not uncommon response to saying, for example, that g(telling the truth is right) would be it is *always* the case that telling the truth is right. The point is that telling the truth is right *is* true at *all* those situations which are significant for determining whether g(telling the truth is right) is true, i.e., the important ones.[5] Situations which are free of a *prima facie* rule conflict are important because in such situations we can determine whether the proposition expressing the rule is "true or false in itself," as opposed to *merely* being false because some other rule overrides it. In other words, a situation where the proposition R is false, even though R is *not* overridden by another *prima facie* rule, would say something about the obligatoriness of R "in itself." That is, more precisely, it would give us an indication of the force of such obligations in other situations void of rule conflict.[6]

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5 We see that "telling the truth is right" not only implies g(telling the truth is right), but is *much* stronger.

6 We have stated matters rather weakly here because a) our primary interest is in teasing out a conception of importance, and b) we do not wish to render a judgment on the universalizability thesis in ethics, one version

(2) Character judgments are based not on what a given individual always does, a criterion which would make it rather difficult for any individual to ever instantiate any character predicate, but rather, I believe, on how one *generally* behaves. To assert that "P is kind," "P is good," "P is friendly," etc. is equivalent to asserting that g(P is kind), g(P is good), g(P is friendly), etc.[7]

The important cases here are rather difficult to characterize, at least in the general way that we have been doing. This is due, in part at least, to the fact that there is little agreement as to what e.g., a "kind" or "friendly" act is. Let us consider kindness, and presuppose a theory which takes it as a necessary condition of kind acts that they "put the individual to the test," so to speak. On such an account, it might be argued, for example, that a situation where P's aiding a desperate soul has no adverse effects on P, is in this sense, unimportant, in that P *cannot* be said to be kind in such a situation. (He has done the right thing, even a good thing, just not a kind thing.) I contend with some uncertainty that the important situations with respect to character predicates are just those where we *can* instantiate the predicates. (This holding independently of the particular theory that one might hold about such a predicate.) But when can you instantiate the predicate? Again, where there are no "external" factors at work, and the situations are such that they provide us with an indication of outcomes involving other situations where the instantiation of the character predicate is under consideration.[8]

This is admittedly more than somewhat unclear, but it should be pointed out that more than a little controversy and uncertainty attaches to some of these issues in ethical theory. Presumably, clearer conceptions in ethics would sharpen our refinements here. The issues are of broad philosophical significance and cannot be dealt with fully here. It *is*

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of which would dictate the obligatoriness of R in all similar situations, void of rule conflict.

[7] A provocative, and I believe correct, generalization of this is to *disposition* terms in general. An obvious argument against this claim can be easily dismissed. It might be argued, that is, that "Table salt is water soluble," admits no negative instances that we know of; whereas saying g(Table salt.......) *suggests* that there are such cases. But "g" can be true when its complement sentence is always true; moreover, it may be the case that there *are* instances where table salt *isn't* soluble in water. Thus "g" would seem to accommodate a certain openness in meaning that we tend to find with disposition terms in general.

[8] We have here something similar to Harean universalizability (of ethical judgments) for character predicates. Certainly "universalizing" character predicates is implausible, but as a brute fact of "practical logic," we often do something like it. Perhaps we should aim at developing, if you will, a "generalizability principle," for character predicates.

important to note, however, that factors directly bearing on the analysis of "g" interface with such weighty philosophic matters.

c--*"Normalcy" and "Projectibility"*

What is it then that makes a situation important with respect to a given proposition? It appears that two requirements are built into this notion. The first we will refer to as a "normalcy" criterion; the second we will refer to as a "projection" criterion. A situation S is said to be *important* with respect to a proposition A (SIA) iff (1) S is *normal* with respect to A (SNA) and (2) S *projects* with respect to A (SPA). Thus we have SIA <=> SNA ^ SPA.)

While the definitions of these two that I shall proffer are self-contained, before so doing I would like to point out that these notions are not without analogues or a little philosophic/linguistic pre-history. The notion of normalcy is related in a rather general way to the classical idea of an "essence," where an essential situation is to be contrasted with an "accidental" one. Perhaps a rather more precise analogue can be found in the notion of a *stereotypical* situation, which apparently has been introduced in linguistic theory, generally in conjunction with model-theoretic frames, to explicate certain concepts.[9] A notion of projection has been discussed in metaphysics and the philosophy of science and inductive logic in connection with the classical confirmation-theoretic puzzles of Hempel and Goodman.[10] It is not all that dissimilar from my idea. It has come to my attention as well, that there is a projectibility concept in foundational mathematics, particularly recursive-function theory and hierarchy theory, which corresponds in some respects to the idea I develop.[11] Finally, there are the obvious parallels between projection and the concept of inference itself: to wit, to say that a situation projects is amongst other things to say that certain kinds of inference can be drawn. On to our definitions.

*Normalcy* can be defined in either of two ways. A "negative" definition would read as follows: SNA iff a) A has a truth value at S and b) S does not possess any factors "external" to A which causally influence A's truth value at S. A "positive" definition would read SNA iff a) above and c) S is so constituted that it *allows* us to consider the truth of A "in itself." (Willie's

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[9] William G. Lycan mentioned this to me in conversation.

[10] For one such discussion of this idea ("projectibility of predicates"), see W. V. O. Quine, "Natural Kinds," appearing in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1977), especially pp. 155-157.

[11] Willard Pines, an intuitionistic logician who has done research in the mathematical foundations of computer science, brought this to my attention.

accidental toss of the dice, evaluations of integrals where the result is known in advance, and prima facie rule R2 overriding R1 illustrate the presence of "external factors." We learn little about how Willie rolls dice, how calculations of integrals tend to turn out, and whether or not R1 has "obligatory force," i.e., little about the respective truths of the propositions "in themselves.") The cases which interest us then in such matters are the normal ones. (The seemingly objectionable "in itself" vernacular, it should be noted here, involves nothing more than a commonly employed descriptive metaphysics.)

*Projection* is defined as follows. SPA iff A's truth value at S provides an indication of A's truth value at situations S' such that S'NA, i.e., at *other* situations which are normal with respect to A. [Skillful rolls of the dice, evaluations which are not "rigged" and the presence of a bona-fide rule of obligation are aspects of situations which may allow them to "project." The class of projectible situations with respect to a proposition may be coextensive with the class of normal situations (as in the integral example, perhaps) or it may stand to it as a proper subset (as in the gambler example)].

On a very rough and intuitive level, our definition of SIA amounts to saying that 1) S is not atypical and 2) S has predictive power for other not atypical situations.[12]

4--*Some Phenomena Explained*

It is time to see whether our semantical analysis can help explain some of the phenomena noted earlier. Since gA is true iff A is true more times than not at a certain *restricted* set of situations, we can see why it seems peculiar to assert that gA when A is true all of the time--"g" is not only "weaker" than "for all" as "some" is, but involves extra conceptual apparatus as well. And I think that the indignation P1 felt, way back when, is explained by the fact that whether gA is true depends upon looking at *important* situations. Such emphatic responses result, perhaps, when P2 chooses as his exemplary instance of a situation where A is false, an

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12 It may be argued, perhaps with some credence, that *non-normal* situations *may* at times be important (e.g., Willie may fail at performance Y due to an external factor X (rendering proposition A false) in such a way that it is clear that it was precisely *because* of X that Willie failed; i.e., Willie would have otherwise succeeded (and A would have been true)). But I seek no change in my analysans for "g," drawing a distinction between the truth conditions for "g" and what I see as considerations pertinent to how "g" relates to certain inferential patterns. In providing truth conditions for "g," "ordinary discourse" is what we turn to - and I do *not* believe that we ordinarily take seriously non-normal situations, at least for the purposes of asserting gA or its negation.

*unimportant* situation. For example, P1 might have said that "It is dangerous to drive one's car on a wet road" and P2 might have pointed out that this is not true if you possess a specialized brake system of some kind. The point is, quite clearly, that the latter situation turns out to be an unimportant one, and P1 draws attention to this fact with his underscored "g" rejoinder.

Note that the concept of importance's additional conceptual apparatus, and the fact that "g" has a quantitative component weaker than "for all" has explained the phenomena. Although we have good reason to believe that we are on the right track, there is still spacious room for error in the last analysis, however.

### 5--*Some Objections*

(1) It may be quite correctly objected that the present analysis fails, in some instances at least, to capture the "force" of "g." Dave, rising to Gene's defense in the courtroom, points out that g(Gene tells the truth). Presumably Dave intends to convey much more than that Gene tells the truth more than half the time in certain appropriate situations. Indeed in this case, g(Gene tells the truth) may mean nothing short of *it is almost always the case that* Gene tells the truth.[13]

(2) And let us not suffer a convenient case of amnesia, forgetting a pressing problem. In some of the arithmetical cases, I(A) may be infinite (indeed it may even be of a very high order of infinity), and the "more than not" clause cries out for elucidation. Precisely what is the probability notion embedded in the analysans of "g"?

### 6--*The "Defeating Claims" Semantics*

We still seek an account of "g" which is hostage to a relativization to important situations and has a quantitative component. An obvious suggestion emerges. Perhaps the quantitative ingredient in the analysans of "g" is a function of the "g" locution under examination. In some cases, that is, gA may be true if A is true more than half the time at important situations (this is meaningful when I(A) is finite), on other occasions we may have to go as far as saying that gA is true when *it is almost always the case that* A, and so forth. *However*, in the absence of some kind of description of how this functional dependence works, "g's" use remains at

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[13] Of course, there may be courtroom contexts where g(Gene tells the truth) may not require that A be true so often at appropriate situations. Throughout we have given only partial accounts of the underlying contexts were gA's truth is being adjudicated. What is ideal, fully-blown accounts of these contexts, is, of course, impossible as well.

the level of a mystery. I now suggest the following account of this functional dependence.

A *motivating* factor in our analysis has been to account for the character of "g" as a rejoinder to a "not-A claim." (Let us now broaden what we take a not-A claim to be. Not-A claims will include such propositions as "It is hardly ever the case that A," ".....infrequently.....A," and so forth.)[14] I now wish to suggest that this consideration is more than a motivating one and include it in the semantics for "g."

Suppose, for example, that a not-A claim "challenges" P's truthfulness in the courtroom. Then I maintain that A need be true at important situations, at a level greater than .5, which is sufficient to counter the courtroom challenge on P's truthfulness. Similarly, if a not-A claim challenges Charlie's proficiency at rolling dice, A need be true at important situations, at a level greater then .5 sufficient to defend the "challenge" on Charlie's proficiency.[15] (In both of these cases note that I(A) is finite (involving important situations from the respective parties past records).)

Numerically, we may look at matters as follows. Suppose that A is made within the context, C, of the not-A claim "It is infrequently the case that A." For such C, we stipulate M(C) to be a level (number) greater then or equal to whatever level would make "It is frequently the case that A" true. Similarly M(C) (with C as expected) may be a number greater than or equal to whatever level would make P a credible courtroom witness or Charlie a proficient gambler.

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[14] It has been suggested to me that these are not not-A claims, but not-gA claims, i.e., contrary generalizations. I think my labeling *is* appropriate and more suggestive, however, because we are interested in a "frequency," if you will, for which not-A is holding over any number of situations; and secondly, though perhaps less significantly, to avoid the (albeit moot) charge that our forthcoming account is circular in that an appropriate level to defeat a not-gA claim is no more than an appropriate level for a gA claim: moot of course, because a not-gA claim would not (except for the trivial case, where the not-gA claim was not-gA) have the same truth conditions as not-gA.

[15] A charge of circularity in our discussion of character predicates may be leveled, but handily dismissed. Recall that I claimed that P has character predicate C iff g(P is C). So it might be thought that if we explicate P has character predicate C, by way of g(P is C), the explication would be circular: for in dealing with a "not P is C claim" we would, in determining the level to defeat the claim, have to deal with "C-ness." The "C-ness" involved here, however, is not let us say, "C-ness" as a "universal" (e.g., kindness, truthfulness, in the abstract, etc.), but rather "C-ness" as a "particular" (e.g., kind act, truthful utterance, etc.). And it is precisely the former kind of C-ness that we are concerned with in our analysandum.

At least in the case where "g" arises as a rejoinder and I(A) is finite our account my be formalized as follows. Suppose that I(A) is large enough for gA to bear a truth value. Further suppose that gA is made within the context or background, C, of a specific not-A challenge. (This is certainly the case in a large number of instances.) V(Ax) = T reads A is true at situation x. Let C denote a not-A context. Let M(C) denote a number, greater than .5, required to defeat the not-A claim. Let Pr be the usual discrete probability function of finite probability theory. Then V(g(A)) = T (with respect to C)[16] if $\Pr(V(Ax) = T)/\chi \varepsilon I(A) \geq M(C)$.

But how do we deal with gA's truth when it is asserted *in vacuo*? (Cases like this are easy enough to imagine. Suppose, for example, that a wildlife expert is giving a lecture to a group of laymen and says "Generally, cheetahs can outrun ocelots," without expecting that anyone in his audience believes otherwise.) I contend that it is natural in such cases to take gA to be true just in case (1) I(A) is sufficiently large and (2) Pr (V(Ax) = T) is greater than .5. Fine for the finite cases! But what are we to make of those perverse infinite "arithmetical" cases?

Well, what then *is* the probability notion employed in these arithmetical cases? Let me quickly provide what I think is an accurate answer, although it will almost certainly be seen at first as a cynical one. The appropriate probability notion is whichever notion should prove appropriate in the case under consideration (or decided to be appropriate). Obviously some elaboration and explanation are required here.

My point is this. "g" locutions in the arithmetical cases are rather odd, albeit well-formed. It is queer to talk about the truth of g(n, a positive integer greater than two is such that $x^n + y^n = z^n$ is false), because one is *not* interested in if it is generally true or not; one wants to know *exactly* when it is true or not, or have some kind of understanding of appropriate distributions of integral numbers where it is true or false. To some extent though this is beside the point. We *can* speak of the truth of gA; gA is well-formed. It is not, as it were, that "g" is *truth-valueless* here. If, for example, it turned out that for numbers smaller than $10^{20}$ "g" was never true, but always true for numbers greater than $10^{20}$ we would unhesitatingly assert gA's truth. And so forth. But the key point is this: to say ahead of time what probability concept will be employed in such cases (or even more "complex" ones where higher orders of infinity are involved), is to move one pace ahead of mathematics. We have a concept of "g" which (hopefully) involves notions like those I have included in the above semantical account. But to find the "right" probability notion(s) for the infinite is a moot question. You most certainly do need a concept of

[16] The "respect to C parenthetical" underscores what should have been perfectly clear from footnote # 13--gA's truth conditions are contextually dependent, because of the functional dependence of M(C) on C.

probability, importance, and so forth (in no matter how crude a form) to be a speaker of the language who has "g" in his(her) vernacular. But you need not be a probability theorist.[17]

I make these claims with some hesitation. It may turn out that the architecture of the human mind is a good deal more complex and different than we think it is; and that in some important sense we do have some very general probability notion "stocked away" which enables us to determine g's truth in these pesky arithmetical cases. But then we would have to answer such questions as why it is that most (if not all of us) are uncertain in these arithmetical cases and many more questions like this. In short, while this view, or at least some suitably qualified version of it, is *logically* a possibility, I believe that it deserves little credence, at the present stage of inquiry.

To recapitulate we have a three-fold analysis of "g." There are those cases where I(A) is finite and gA arises as a not-A rejoinder. There are those cases where I(A) is finite and "g" does not arise as a rejoinder. These two cases we have explicitly dealt with. Finally there are those cases where a predicate "stronger" than "g" is true, and hence gA is true. For example, g(lying is wrong) is true because *It is always the case that* lying is wrong is true at important situations. As another example of a stronger predicate obtaining, we might have *It is almost always the case that* $x^n + y^n \neq z^n$ (if say it was established that for some finite m whenever n was greater than m, $x^n + y^n \neq z^n$), and this would in turn entail g( $x^n + y^n \neq z$). Note however, that in the first case, the probability of A being true at an important situation is 1. In the second case, the abstract probability of $x^n + y^n \neq z^n$ being true is 1 at all important situations (every instantiation of numbers corresponds to an "important" situation). So even these examples give way to an importance/probability account. (Whether we always give way to such a breakdown in these cases I leave as an open problem, i.e., can we ever assert gA on the basis of a stronger operator obtaining without an importance / probability account being implicit?)

We have offered a trifurcated semantics for "g." The complications and trenchant difficulties of the cases we have been considering make a univocal reading more than a little unrealistic. Yet insofar as our analyses invariably involve a kind of wedding between probabilistic notions and our

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[17] One is reminded here (and in what follows) of Churchland's argument against certain representational accounts of propositional knowledge, on the grounds that it would seem unlikely that children could understand and be involved with certain inference patterns in such accounts. The point being we would like the *same* sense of *knowing that* for children as adults. See Paul Churchland, *Scientific Realism and The Plasticity of The Human Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1977). William G. Lycan has pointed out to me that the same problem is shared by such other "natural language quantifiers" as "few," "many," "most," etc.

concept of importance, it *is* in a sense univocal. Along these lines, please note that the early theories we criticized fail not for not being univocal, but because they treat the probabilitistic ("more than not" or "most" elements) component in a rather cavalier fashion--it is anything but obvious what these terms *mean*, and secondarily because they ignore an intentional component, in our study, "importance," in analyzing "g."

*6--"g" as an Inferential Generalization*

Although we have referred to "g" as a generalization throughout, we have yet to make explicit what it is a generalization *from* and *to*.[18] Quite simply, "g" involves making an inference from the fact that proposition A has had a certain probability of being true at *important* situations (at least this is often the case) to the corresponding expectation for A at *normal* situations in the present.[19] If g(Johnny does well on his math exams), we expect that Johnny will do well on today's math exam. If g(Martha keeps her appointments), I believe she will keep her next one, and so on. An implicit assumption in these inferences is that the situations involved are *normal* ones. If Johnny's test was of a special difficult kind that he was unaccustomed to, or if there was something that made it unusually hard for Martha to keep her appointment, we would not have the expectations that we do. These are *non-normal* situations which "g" does not clue us in on.

*7--Conclusion*

The notion of generality would seem to be an enormously important one in philosophy, indeed philosophy itself has sometimes been characterized as the search for *general* truths of a certain kind. Particularly in my examples from ethics, I hope to have touched on some philosophically stimulating issues in connection with propositions of the form gA. Semantical issues concerning "g" rather obviously bear on longstanding and weighty problems in the philosophy of inductive logic, as well.

I have, to some extent, deliberately muddled the distinction between the concept of generality per se and the (apparently) narrower semantical

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18 Observe that this generalization feature of "g" doesn't really relate to these odd arithmetical cases, or cases where we know ahead of time that our complement sentence is true (e.g., "5=5"), at least in any non-trivial sense. I tend to think of these kinds of complement sentences as dubious or peripheral arguments of "g."

19 I apologize for the rather loose usage here; it is important to distinguish between "g" and its inferential uses--I have only described matters in this way because I felt it would be suggestive of "g's" role.

problem I have chosen to analyze as a stratagem for sharpening that which has latent philosophical interest. Finally, it is hoped that the notion of "importance," a decidedly intentional one, should prove philosophically meritorious in its own right, as well as a crucial one in analyzing other significant semantical notions.

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